

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2014
6:00 PM**

ATTENDANCE: Co-chair Brannelly; Council members: Swain, Taylor-Moye,
Vizzo-Paniccia

NON-COMMITTEE: Council President McCarthy, Council members: McBride-Lee,
Torres, Halstead, Salter

Co-chair Brannelly called the public hearing to order at 6:05 pm.

She stated that each speaker that signed up will have a 3-minute time limit.

She introduced the committee members and the non-committee members that were present.

- ❖ *All speaker comments and statements have been summarized. The comments and statements are written here in statement form; rather than he said/she said format; for the purpose of conveying the true message as it was spoken:*

Item (66-13) - Mayor's Proposed General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2014 – 2015

Fran Rabinowitz, Interim Superintendent; 45 Lyon Terrace stated that she was there to advocate full funding of the (MER), noting that she would be grateful. She stressed that the schools are in great need and they are hurting, in terms of limited staff. She stated that they are in need of hiring additional staff for special education, counselors etc. She urged the committee to think of ways to augment the MER for the students and parent's sake.

Tom Lombard, 2156 Park Avenue spoke on behalf of Bob Keeley. He read a statement from Bob Keeley that highlighted his support of increased funding for the Bridgeport school system to establish a Department of Youth Services and Department of Recreation. The statement outlined that children deserve better than they currently receive and that we must also rethink our education system as we now know it. In addition, we need to reinvigorate our Bridgeport community to fight and overcome the political impediments that currently deny Bridgeport children a proper education. In

summary, he expressed that we must create a new reality starting with a total commitment to our children, leaving bad political decision-making in the dust.

Donna Koolis, Bassick High School, S.G.C. stated that the Board of Education really needed funding. She referenced a report that was received, related to the school being on probation due to the condition of the facility. She relayed that lab desks are in disrepair. She emphasized that they are good kids and they have seen the conditions at the school worsen; the roof leaks that causes the tiles to fall down. She strongly urged to put the children first.

Jocelyn Ault, 1181 Fairfield Avenue, Bassick High School PRC stated that she was convinced that they will continue to do what has been done. However, she said they then need to determine what's important, noting that expenses will grow. She urged funding of the educational system and to continue the attitude of "together we can" for the sake of the talented kids she sees.

Maria Pereira, 85 Nutmeg Road stated that she is a graduate of the Bridgeport school system and she has a child in public school. She highlighted the following points: MER in reference to the review of the audits; 2003, 2004 and 2005 audits and the alleged violation of state law per the amounts mentioned; the audits were never completed; the claim that the city undercut the Board of Education by \$13 million and the audits revealed that the City of Bridgeport undercut the Board of Education in violation of state law; indirect costs charged by the city that have gone unexplained; CT statutes have been disregarded that put a stranglehold on the BOE budget; the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) submitted and in place should be in accordance with compliance. She emphasized that the \$5.2 million that is being requested should be the only amount that is accepted.

Tammy Boyle, 324 Lyon Terrace stated that PACT was a recognized organization that represents 20,000 parents. She highlighted the following comments regarding: cash contribution to public schools that has only been increased by \$3 million; the 2012 forums that were held to discuss state taxes being raised to increase funding to public schools; during 2013, they voted to take back \$1 million which equated to a \$2 million appropriation; the \$3.3 million appropriation for this school year as of today, Bridgeport hasn't been paid the \$3.3 million required by state law. She emphasized that anything less than \$5.2 million is unacceptable and they will not accept a violation of state law, because the children deserve more.

Gabrielle Rosario, Central High School student in the 11th grade stated that she knows how bad the Bridgeport schools need the extra money. Teachers have to be careful about giving out supplies and books because of the fear that they may run out. The

students deserve a quality education and given all the tools to make sure that they have the chance to succeed. With the parent's tax dollars, they should ensure a quality education. She urged funding to help the students excel.

Joann Kennedy, Hancock Avenue stated that they need quality education for the students. She emphasized that she was sure they want what is best for all children. They need to spend the money wisely, noting that overall we are responsible for "our" children. She noted that she has children in public schools and she wants them to have a quality education. They need to respect each other and do what's right over and above. She emphasized that the message to children should be to reach for the stars, but then they are told that they can't give the money to the schools; this defeats the meaning of the message to believe in the schools.

Tony Barr, 405 Taft Avenue strongly urged to give the kids in Bridgeport a chance and opportunity. The kids are being disrespected and shouldn't have to beg.

Rob Traber, 110 Hale Terrace recalled that council chambers during the 1990's was packed with speakers that came forward to beg for money for the schools. There is great skepticism about the intent of the city council, noting that the children suffer and if the city and state don't pay their share, then who is the victim. Mr. Trefy, Superintendent of Schools at the time compared the Bridgeport school system to a starving child. He urged that the city council closely consider what happens to children that are the future of the city.

Jehan Raheem, Fairfield Avenue emphasized the topic of quality education in Bridgeport won't be improved unless it's fully funded. Schools can't survive with limited resources and supplies. He urged the city council to ensure that the decision reflects a fundamental decision to fund.

Robert Jefferies, 794 Norman Street spoke about against the budget, due to spending way too much money in general. Relayed it was a mirror image scenario with a big debt in other areas. We need to consider living within our means and come up with positive solutions. The situation is likened to putting a shovel in the hole, but you don't stop digging.

Jacqueline Keller, 392 Eckart Street spoke about having the ingredients of a world class education in Bridgeport that will attract people to the area. They have expert teachers, but they need the resources to bring the quality of education up. It's important to close the achievement gap and they need to build a scale of excellence and they can't do without full funding and meet the (MBR). The children deserve it.

Steve Karganis, 425 Thorne Street stated that he has been a school social worker for twenty years. He had concerns about wanting students to achieve, but they aren't inspiring them by fighting over money. It doesn't make sense to have the worst school system, if they want to produce productive, viable employees. Questioned when was the last time a state representative attended a Board of Education meeting. The children shouldn't be treated as second hand citizens and they shouldn't be given a second hand education. They aren't preparing them for higher paying jobs and they are taking the youth and their dreams from children and need to fight for them. Politicians make empty promises and it's crucial to expect great things for the betterment of the students and set a better example.

David Gordon, 2612 North Avenue thanked the council members present for taking the time to listen to the public, noting shame on the others that weren't present. He has worked in Bridgeport schools for twenty years as a substance abuse counselor. The current budget isn't close to funding education for children and it's not fair. How will they compete with mediocre resources? They need to serve the best interest of the constituents. They need to address the problem of gang activity that infiltrates the schools and they need to address the 50% drop out rate. The schools are continuously producing poor results. He asked to construct a budget to reflect the true needs of children, because the issue is getting serious about the future of students. The budget should meet the (MBR).

John Marshall Lee, 30 Beacon Street spoke about the departmental budgets being situated differently in terms of the budget review process. The stipend accounts haven't been revised appropriately. For the current debt, why don't they require a purchase shown for each expenditure on the debit card? The charitable contributions report as it applies to the payment to the city, to make the point that's why the budget is out of balance. Why are there department vacancies and positions that haven't been reported or listed? Questioned how much will be available, noting the estimate will be approximately \$7 million that will help the budget. The grant revenue from the Lighthouse Program isn't shown in the budget or reported. Fringe benefits to city employees aren't reported. He urged funding the schools for the full budget.

Steve Nelson, Stoneridge Apartments had a concern that without proper funding, it will be difficult for employees to perform. The school system needs help from all government entities because under funding destroys the entire community and inadequate education contributes to; high crime, homelessness, joblessness. Funding schools promotes; college education, jobs in the community and a lower crime rate. Why is Bridgeport receiving a lower amount of funding than New Haven? He urged to please address the issue.

Dr. Dan, 280 Compo Road Westport, stated that he is a teacher at Bassick High School. He loves the city and has been teaching for three years. He's shocked at the condition of the building and there are environment issues. He reconsidered going back to Norwalk to teach, however; he found that the students are fantastic and they are looking to excel and many have gone on to Ivy League schools. The students need support and he pleaded to fully fund the (MBR). The lack of funds has affected the loss of support to numerous school programs and activities. They need to ensure that students have a fighting chance.

Bishop Griffith, 707 Central Avenue stated that he is an advocate for children and for change in the school system. He wants to ensure adequate funding for all schools. Asking them to compete with less money is like asking for a miracle. Classes aren't up to par and books and materials are sparse. They need to look at the budget closely, noting that the proposed \$229 million isn't sufficient. Emphasized that helping children is important and he believed in education. They should support the request for full funding to meet the requirements and take care of the children. He expressed that education is the key to economics.

Claudia Phillips, 74 Alameda Place expressed her gratitude to Mayor Finch for the work he's done in the city, particularly his support of charter schools. Overall she was pleased with the Mayor's direction regarding the schools.

Ethan Book, 144 Coleman Street mentioned the city's internal audit process that has been terminated and the legal aide position that was de-funded during 2012. The situation puts everyone at a disadvantage by eliminating these positions, noting they would help improve things to help the city run more efficiently and the budget process run smoother. Mentioned the stipends that the council members currently receive versus what they received in past years and compared to other cities, in relation to the alleged abuse of stipends.

Marylee Taylor, 59 Bennett Street stated that she has a daughter in second grade. Two charter schools have been constructed and included in the budget, but it's difficult for a child to get in unless their name is pulled from the lottery. They are proposing to take millions from the budget to build a bridge in Black Rock, when they should be putting the money into the schools. They need to figure out where we want the city to go.

Michael Rosario, 135 Beverly Drive a student at Central Magnet School mentioned the Mayor including in-kind services in the \$5.2 million and they want the funding in cash. During 2014-2015, \$224 million has been proposed for 21,000 students, questioned why the amount seems much less than New Haven schools receive.

Ileana the parent of three girls in Bridgeport schools congratulated the Mayor for looking at the education issue. She was there to contest the budget, noting that they need to come together as a community. Parents are most important in their child's life and they needed more parental input. They need to cross the finish line by educating children, commenting that children of single parents generally tend to mostly be the ones that get into trouble.

Samantha Roach, 52 Waldorf Avenue stated that we can't commence to have passion for children if we can't relate to them. She believed that not funding education is akin to suppressing children. If they have the opportunity to believe in the education system, they will have hope. Frustration is expressed by kids in the Bridgeport school system and as a parent; there is concern due to being pro-education. There is also concern about her son, a young black male and she has considered relocating to Fairfield or Trumbull so that he can receive a quality education and she shouldn't have to consider this. He should be afforded the same quality education as other towns give their students. She urged them to fully fund the schools, to allow the students to succeed.

David King, 199 Yacht Street stated that he is a former Central High School student. He struggled with reading and since then, he has been an active member of the community. It's sad to hear that 6th and 8th graders have said that the budget stops them from doing certain things. He wants to eliminate the problem of kids leaving school without learning to read to get a good job. He stressed that the council needs to consider the students education, so they can go on to live properly and they can't do that without a proper education.

Jeanne Meadows stated that during the year 2006, it cost \$4.69 to educate each student and now the amount is \$2.00 per student. A box of crayons at state bid is .35 and there isn't enough to fund programs; clay had to be donated to keep two art programs going. There was no support for equipment needed and they can't continue to do this to children. She's dedicated to kids and expressed that creativity is the number one thing they ask from children. She has spent money out of her paycheck to do her job. She strongly questioned how dare they treat people like this?

David Goodman, 746 Railroad Avenue emphasized that residents pay high taxes. Where is the money going because kids are suffering and why are they putting the burden on taxpayers. Why not fund education like they should. Elected officials aren't doing their job right and should be. It's a shame and when elections are held, they want to be voted in. Teachers work and are dedicated, but they are failing to give them what they need and it's shameful and wrong. There are issues with city officials related to education, taxes and other issues. He's against bringing in charter schools unless they address the public school system first.

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Tom Coble, Hartford, CT spoke about being a former Bridgeport resident. He has a grandchild in the public school system, noting that the formerly; the school system was good, but it's changed. The core problem for him was looking at the people in the audience tonight pleading for good quality education. It's crucial to recognize the matter of coming forward to ask for what they need. He grew up in the community and was committed to the citizens. They must be aware of the way each council member votes for the budget and they need to take a better position and do the right thing.

Steve Nelson spoke for the second time. He added that the (MBR) matter was very upsetting to the community and he stressed that they should take time and go to the schools to observe what they are presenting to the children. He mentioned athletics in Bridgeport to comment that a little over a million dollars has been spent, noting that other towns spend triple that amount on sports. So again, there is a question of how kids will compete. He once again urged them to visit schools to observe the conditions. He pointed out that many of the schools are dirty for no reason, because they don't have the proper supplies to clean with.

Mildred Maldonado stated that the school system was strong in the past, but as years went by; they started to deteriorate. She has seen the arts and education suffer as she has grown older and although she doesn't have any school age children in the city, she noted that her sons have moved to other towns so their kids could receive a better education. They need to educate the children in Bridgeport and she wants to urge her children to come back to teach. She commented that she believed they are barking up the wrong tree and they need to get together and fight Hartford and let them know that the city belongs to the citizens. It's crucial to provide a good education system and lead in the right direction, before it becomes a dead issue.

Jim Damone stated that he has two boys in public school. The budget isn't a desire, it's a necessity. Please fund fully.

Kenny Jackson, 519 Connecticut Avenue stated that he hoped what he said wasn't a formality. The city is known for being corrupt and for being in a politically weak environment. Any time that people have to come forward to speak up for the students is wrong and the matter should be addressed by the elected officials. If they aren't funded, they will continue to have failing schools. They shouldn't have to fight for children to receive a good education. He relayed his past trouble and being incarcerated, noting that he changed his life. He made an analogy in reference to what could happen to our children if they don't fully fund schools, and mentioned that there is a book with an illustrated book cover that shows a school bus next to a prison bus.

Gladys Walker Jones, 44 Oxford Street mentioned the rate of Bridgeport property taxes compared to Greenwich. They need to provide for the (MBR), noting that the path was before them and she urged to fund the (MBR) fully.

Cynthia Jacques, 174 Bronx Avenue a student stated that she was there to say that they should fund Bridgeport schools for other kids that are willing to learn; as well as students that come from other countries to build up their academic skills.

Jeanne Russo, 9 Granfield Avenue stated that she was born and raised in Bridgeport and attended public school. Teachers and students need the full funding and they need to give to the children what is theirs!

PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED

**** COUNCIL PRESIDENT McCARTHY MOVED TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING**
**** COUNCILMEMBER TAYLOR-MOYE SECONDED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The public hearing closed at 7:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Graham
Telesco Secretarial Services